Pragmatic Competence as a Regulator of Foreign Language Speaking Proficiency

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ABSTRACT: Pragmatic competence is a multifaceted componential construct (Ifantidou & Tzanne, 2012) in the performance of which different underlying sub-skills produce a range of possible effects on learners' speaking proficiency. In the study we report on, data from 180 Iranian EFL students were collected (90 boys vs. 90 girls), and the Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient used to test whether and to what degree the macro and micro components of Prutting and Kirchner's (1987) Pragmatic Protocol correlate with learners' scores on the speaking component of the IELTS General Training Test, and whether any perceived relationship varies according to gender. Results indicated that the verbal and paralinguistic components of the Protocol correlated significantly with the different tasks that feature in the IELTS speaking test. This, we argue, has implications for language teaching, and in particular stresses the need to foster conditions that allow for the development in learners of a more fine-tuned understanding of the relationship between language and context and the ways in which particular components of pragmatic competence are called upon in the performance of different kinds of communicative tasks.
Keywords: differential instruction, EFL learners, IELTS speaking test, pragmatic competence, speaking proficiency, testing.

La competencia pragmática como reguladora de la competencia oral en la lengua extranjera

RESUMEN: La competencia pragmática es un constructo compuesto multifacético (Ifantidou & Tzanne, 2012) en cuyo desempeño distintas sub-habilidades subyacentes producen una variedad de efectos posibles en la competencia oral del estudiante. En el estudio que aquí se reporta, se recolectó data de 180 estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera (90 hombres versus 90 mujeres), usando el coeficiente de correlación producto-momento de Pearson para determinar si existe correlación, y hasta qué grado, de los macro y micro componentes del Protocolo Pragmático de Prutting and Kirchner's (1987) con el puntaje de los estudiantes en el componente oral de IELTS General Training Test; y si alguna relación percibida varía de acuerdo al género. Los resultados indican que existe una correlación significativa entre los componentes verbales y paralingüísticos del Protocolo con las diferentes tareas que incluye la prueba oral de IELTS. Esto tiene implicancias para la enseñanza del idioma y enfatiza la necesidad de promover condiciones que permitan en los estudiantes el

desarrollo de una mayor comprensión de la relación entre lenguaje y contexto y las formas en se requieren componentes específicos de la competencia pragmática en el desempeño de diferentes tipos de tareas comunicativas.
Palabras clave: instrucción diferencial, estudiantes de EFL, prueba de expresión oral IELTS, competencia pragmática, competencia oral.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the communicative approach to language teaching over 40 years ago, with its focus on the related notions of appropriacy and authentic language, pragmatic competence has been a key focus of research and, to a lesser extent it must be said, pedagogy. Crystal has defined pragmatic competence in the following terms:

> The study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. (Crystal, 1997, p. 301).

Pragmatic competence emerged as a natural product of a communicative approach (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985) which emphasised language use over language usage and which challenged the emphasis on form rather than function that typified the grammar-translation and audiolingual methodologies which preceded it and which devoted little attention to context and the way in which users are appropriate with language in real-life communication (also see Morady Moghaddam, 2019; Widdowson, 1989). The construct of communicative competence, originally articulated by Hymes in (1972), underpinned communicative language teaching. In addition to what he termed the 'possible' (grammatically acceptable) and the 'feasible' (processable), Hymes's articulation included the 'appropriate' (contextually *apposite*) and the 'actually performed' (what speakers actually do – sometimes called *attested language*). These last two parameters constituted an acknowledgement that one can be perfectly grammatical but not necessarily appropriate with language and may therefore produce utterances that are formally correct but would not be uttered by a competent speaker of the language in a given context. This social dimension of language has since been reflected in other componential descriptions of communicative competence and variously accounted for via terms including 'sociolinguistic competence' and 'discourse competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980; the two were later conflated by Canale, 1983, into the unitary parameter of discourse competence), 'pragmatic competence' (Bachman, 1990), and sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competence (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2013).

Common as it is to all accounts of communicative competence, pragmatic competence has been widely studied by scholars concerned with foreign language teaching and learning (Ifantidou, 2013). There is ample evidence that pragmatic competence plays a key role in successful communication (Haastrup, 1986; Ryan, 2016) and that a deficit of pragmatic competence leads to communication breakdown (Allami & Naeimi, 2011). However, a high level of overall competence or proficiency may not guarantee successful communication, for as Allami and Naeimi (2011, p. 385) discovered, "upper-intermediate learners tended

to transfer more L1 sociocultural norms to L2 and made more pragmatic errors than the lower-intermediate learners."

Research has reported positive effects of pragmatic awareness on performance in language classrooms and has shown that learners can benefit from an explicit approach to the teaching of pragmatics (House, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Murray, 2012; Takahashi, 2010; Kecskes, 2015). Deda (2016) highlights the relationship between teaching speech acts and the developing pragmatic competence of EFL students through classroom activities. Likewise, Ifantidou (2013) investigated the development of pragmatic competence in non-native undergraduate students and found that explicit intervention has both short- and long-term effects on learners' pragmatic development. Ishihara (2007) has similarly documented the importance of pragmatics in language teaching and learning in language classes. In his study, he demonstrated that the explicit provision of meta-pragmatic information may be more effective than implicit provision. Meanwhile, Jianda (2006) and Murray (2010) argue that EFL teachers should work to develop learners' understanding of the elements of pragmatic competence, the principles and conditions governing their use, and their significance in communication. Within the existing research, however, little attention has been paid to the componential nature of pragmatic competence and the effect of these different components on speaking performance. Research in this area promises to help researchers better conceptualise the construct, and teachers and materials designers focused on developing learners' speaking skills to more effectively differentiate what to teach, when, how and to whom.

2. The study

Drawing on Prutting and Kirchner's tripartite Pragmatic Protocol (1987; see Appendix), the study we report on here sought to ascertain how the different macro and micro components of pragmatic competence specified within the Protocol are correlated with different types of L2 speaking tasks, as measured via the three sections of the IELTS speaking test[1], a high currency, high stakes test of English language proficiency widely used by universities worldwide for gatekeeping purposes. It also sought to determine which, if any, elements of the Protocol correlate more strongly with male vs. female EFL learners, in light of Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) belief that gender plays a significant role in variation in language use, and Kecskes' (2015) claim that pragmatic competence is equally distributed among individuals but is manifested differently across languages and possibly across individuals and genders. The results of our study promise to help language teachers/materials developers provide more focused instruction in their attempts to develop learners' pragmatic competence, such that they are able to tune their communicative behaviour more precisely according to the particular nature of the task at hand. Our research questions were as follows:

1. Which components (micro and macro) of The Pragmatic Protocol are most strongly correlated with learners' performance on the three tasks of the IELTS speaking test?
2. Do any correlations found between components (micro and macro) of the Pragmatic Protocol and learners' performance on IELTS speaking test differ according to gender?

[1] According to Fulcher and Reiter (2003), speaking task difficulty and task conditions can alter test scores.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

180 senior high-school students (90 male and 90 female) aged 15 to 18 participated in the study (M_{age} = 16.83, *SD* = 1.070) (see Table 1). Cluster sampling was used to randomly select the students from among 350 students enrolled in two Nemune-Dolati schools, one boys-only and one girls-only, both of which are located in Ali-Abad city, northeastern Iran. The girls-only school comprises eight classes (two of tenth-graders, three of eleventh-graders, and three of twelfth-graders), and the boys-only school six classes (two of tenth-graders, two of eleventh-graders, and two of twelfth-graders). We observed 30 students, selected randomly from each grade during their first term of study (i.e. 90 students from each school, totalling 180 students). We elected to gather data from Nemune-Dolati schools because the students who enrol in these schools are required to pass a standard screening test success in which indicates that they are of upper-intermediate proficiency, something we were able to confirm by referring to the scores they had achieved on a written module of the Cambridge English Unlimited Placement Test (2010)[2], administered and scored by the researchers.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the participants.

Gender	Number	Age
Female	90	15-18
Male	90	15-18
Total	180	15-18

3.2. Materials

Two instruments were employed in the study: Prutting and Kirchner's Pragmatic Protocol (1987; see Appendix), and the speaking component of the IELTS. Thirty pragmatic parameters are included in the Protocol, categorised into three macro-components (verbal, paralinguistic, and nonverbal) which together subsume seven micro-components (verbal: speech acts, topics, turn taking, lexical selection, stylistic variations; paralinguistic: intelligibility and prosodies; nonverbal: kinesics and proxemics). Following Prutting and Kirchner's (1987) assignation of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' to each component of the Protocol, the authors made judgements on participants' speaking behaviour as either appropriate or inappropriate – specifying 'no opportunity to observe', where this applied. Each of these conditions was defined by the authors to guide raters and thereby increase the reliability of their judgements.

The second instrument used in the study was the IELTS speaking test, which comprises three sections, described in Table 2[3]. Mirroring the IELTS rating scale, three raters (the researchers) assessed learners' speaking proficiency on a scale of 1-9.

[2] This is a multiple choice test comprising 120 vocabulary and structure items. Participants had to finish the test in 40 minutes.

[3] Retrieved from https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-test/understand-test-format/speaking-test.

Table 2. A description of the relevant three parts of the IELTS speaking module.

Section	Duration	Information
Part 1 Introduction and interview	4–5 minutes	The examiner will introduce him or herself and ask you to introduce yourself and confirm your identity. The examiner will ask you general questions on familiar topics, e.g. home, family, work, studies and interests. This section should help you relax and talk naturally.
Part 2 Individual long turn	3–4 minutes	The examiner will give you a task card which asks you to talk about a particular topic, including points to include in your talk. You will be given one minute to prepare and make notes. You will then be asked to talk for 1-2 minutes on the topic. You will not be interrupted during this time, so it is important to keep talking. The examiner will then ask you one or two questions on the same topic.
Part 3 Two-way discussion	4–5 minutes	The examiner will ask you further questions which are connected to the topic of Part 2. These questions are designed to give you an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas.

In order to ensure that the learners' scores on the speaking test were a product only of their speaking proficiency and not their familiarity with the topic, for Parts 2 and 3 of the speaking test (see Table 2), topics were selected which related to education as it was felt that participants were more likely to be familiar with these. Table 3 presents the inter-rater reliability statistics[4] for the IELTS speaking scores and the components of the Pragmatic Protocol, based on the data collected in the study.

[4] To find an agreement for the two raters and to check the inter-rater reliability, we followed the following procedure: The scores (i.e. two meaningful pairs) provided by the two raters were fed to SPSS software in order to employ Interclass Correlation (equivalent to the Pearson Correlation Coefficient). Thus, Table 3 (Reliability statistics) indicates the results in each section of the study.

Table 3. Reliability statistics.

		Total sample ($N = 180$)	Female Participants ($N = 90$)	Male Participants ($N = 90$)
		Reliability	Reliability	Reliability
	Speaking (Total)	.99	.99	.98
	Speaking / Part 1	.97	.96	.97
	Speaking / Part 2	.97	.98	.96
	Speaking / Part 3	.98	.98	.98
Pragmatics / Micro Components	Speech Acts	.98	98	.99
	Topic	.99	.98	.99
	Turn Taking	.99	.99	.99
	Lexical Selection	.98	.97	.98
	Stylistic Variations	.98	.99	.97
	Intelligibility & Prosodics	.99	.99	.99
	Kenesics & Proxemics	.99	.99	.99
Pragmatics/ Macro Components	Verbal	.99	.99	.99
	Paralinguistic	.99	.99	.99
	Nonverbal	.99	.99	.99

3.3. Procedure

Permission was obtained from the deans of the respective institutes to visit the high schools and to attend English classes as observers. Overall, six boys-only and eight girls-only classes (180 students) were observed. The Pragmatic Protocol was completed after observing learners as they engaged in spontaneous conversations with a partner for 15 minutes. Prutting and Kirchner (1987) suggest that a 15-minute observation provides enough input to complete the Protocol. Observers were positioned at the back of the classroom and observed the conversations as unobtrusively as possible. We recorded the observations to ensure intra-rater reliability was maintained. For each student, two Pragmatic Protocols were filled out by the researchers to provide a more objective record of learners' communicative acts. In cases of 'no opportunity to observe' or 'dissonance between the two evaluations', the assessment was repeated, employing a third researcher as an independent rater. All students participated in free discussions, but only the selected students' protocols were filled out by the researchers. Using the IELTS, two research assistants assessed the learners' speaking proficiency during the free discussion and inter-rater reliability was calculated to be .89. Inter-rater reliability in relation to the scores awarded for each of the three parts of IELTS speaking test was calculated to be .87, .83, and .81 respectively. In respect of the overall pragmatic score, inter-rater reliability was calculated at .99.

4. Results

Learners' speaking performance as measured via the IELTS speaking component and, specifically, their pragmatic performance specified according to the Pragmatic Protocol, is captured in the statistics presented in Table 2. Version 24 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for all statistical analyses carried out.

Table 4. Participants' performance statistics.

		Total sample (N = 180)		Female Participants (n = 90)		Male Participants (n = 90)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	Speaking (Total)	5.19	1.50	4.98	1.46	5.41	1.51
	Speaking / Part 1	2.20	.50	2.15	.46	2.25	.54
	Speaking / Part 2	1.65	.57	1.56	.57	1.74	.56
	Speaking / Part 3	1.34	.54	1.26	.55	1.41	.53
Pragmatics / Micro	Speech Acts	1.46	.65	1.34	.75	1.57	.51
	Topic	3.20	.96	3.12	1.05	3.28	.86
	Turn Taking	7.50	1.81	7.10	2.02	7.91	1.54
	Lexical Selection	1.68	.58	1.66	.51	1.71	.64
	Stylistic Variations	.56	.49	.51	.50	.61	.49
	Intelligibility & Prosodics	3.38	1.23	3.54	1.21	3.23	1.23
	Kenesics & Proxemics	4.97	1.54	5.25	1.37	4.70	1.66
Pragmatics / Macro	Verbal	14.42	3.77	13.74	4.04	15.10	3.36
	Paralinguistic	3.38	1.23	3.54	1.21	3.23	1.23
	Nonverbal	4.97	1.54	5.25	1.37	4.70	1.66

4.1. Bivariate correlation

Before conducting the correlational analysis, a normal distribution of the data was established for each of the two variables, with the skewness and kurtosis values being within the range of -1 to +1 (see Table 5). The respective scatter plots illustrating distribution are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Table 5. Normal distribution of the data.

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Speaking (Total)	-.301	.181	-.872	.360
Pragmatics (Total)	-.514	.181	-1.022	.360

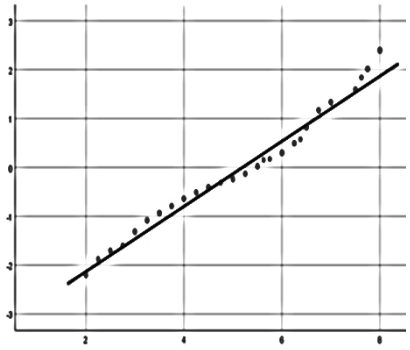

Figure. 1. Normal Q-Q Plot of Total Speaking Scores.

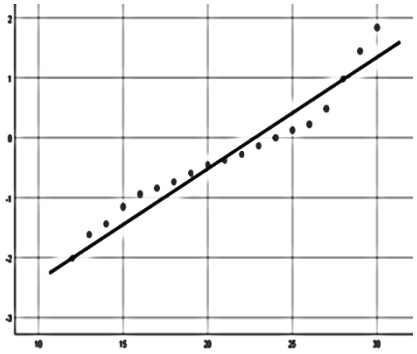

Figure. 2. Normal Q-Q Plot of Total Pragmatic Acts.

Given the sensitivity of the Pearson correlation outlier effects, it was established that there were no outliers in the data, that the assumption of linearity was therefore met, and that the data thus reached the point of standardisation and normality. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed for each of the research questions and the resulting statistics are presented in the following sections.

4.2. Research question 1

The first research question concerns the correlation between the components (micro and macro) of the Pragmatic Protocol and learners' performance on three sections of the IELTS speaking test. To address this question, the Pearson test was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The correlational statistics for the components of the Pragmatic Protocol and the IELTS speaking test.

			Speaking / Part 1	Speaking / Part 2	Speaking / Part 3
Pragmatics / Macro	Verbal	Correlation	.65	.69	.68
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Paralinguistic	Correlation	.58	.64	.71
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Nonverbal	Correlation	.21	.23	.27
		Sig.	.004	.001	.000
Pragmatics / Micro	Speech Acts	Correlation	.66	.54	.62
		Sig	.000	.000	.000
	Topic	Correlation	.35	.46	.48
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Turn Taking	Correlation	.61	.64	.62
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Lexical Selection	Correlation	.48	.47	.41
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Stylistic Variations	Correlation	.53	.66	.65
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Intelligibility & Prosodics	Correlation	.58	.64	.71
		Sig.	.000	.000	.000
	Kenesics & Proxemics	Correlation	.21	.23	27
		Sig.	.004	.001	.000

4.2.1. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (first section) and the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

In order to assess which, if any, macro components (verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic) of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly correlated with the first section of the IELTS speaking test (i.e. introduction and interview), a Pearson Product-Moment test was applied. As shown in Table 6, the verbal ($p < .05$, r = .65), paralinguistic ($p < .05$, r = .58), and nonverbal ($p < .05$, $r = .21$) components are significantly positively correlated with the score on the first section of the speaking test. The r values indicate that the strength of the correlation is larger for the verbal component than the paralinguistic and nonverbal components; that is, the verbal component has the most significant positive association with scores obtained on the first section of the IELTS speaking test (.65 > .58; .65 > .21).

4.2.2. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (first section) and micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

As the *p* values in Table 6 indicate, all the sub-components of the verbal, paralinguistic and nonverbal categories of the Pragmatic Protocol are positively correlated with performance on the first section of IELTS speaking test ($p < .05$), namely 'speech acts', 'topic', 'turn taking', 'lexical selection', 'stylistic variations', 'intelligibility and prosodics', and 'kenesics and proxemics'. The use of 'speech acts' is most significantly correlated (r = .66), followed by 'turn taking', 'intelligibility and prosodics', 'stylistic variations', 'lexical selection', 'topic', and 'kenesics and proxemics', respectively.

4.2.3. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (second section) and the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

To explore which, if any, macro components (verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic) of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly correlated with the second section of the IELTS speaking test (i.e. individual long turn), the Pearson Product-Moment test was applied. As shown in Table 6, all the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol show a positive correlation with scores obtained on the second section of IELTS speaking test ($p < .05$); however, there is significant variation between the verbal, paralinguistic and nonverbal components in terms of the strength of correlation. The r values indicate that the verbal component is most strongly correlated with the scores achieved during the second section of IELTS speaking test (r = .69) followed by paralinguistic (r = .64) and nonverbal (r = .23), respectively.

4.2.4. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (second section) and the micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

To find out which micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly correlated with the second section of the IELTS speaking test, the researchers conducted the Pearson correlation test. As shown in Table 6, 'stylistic variations' (r = .66), 'turn taking' (r = .64), 'intelligibility and prosodics' (r = .64), 'speech acts' (r = .54), 'lexical selection' (r = .47), 'topic' (r = .46), and 'kinesics and proxemics' (r = .23) show positive correlations with scores achieved on the second section of the test, with 'stylistic variation' the most significantly correlated, according to the r values calculated.

4.2.5. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (third section) and the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

In order to explore which macro components (verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic) of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly correlated with the third section of the IELTS speaking test, the Pearson Product test was again applied. As reported in Table 6, the *p* values indicate that all the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly positively correlated with scores obtained on the third section of the IELTS speaking test ($p < .05$). Furthermore, based on the r values obtained (Table 6), it can be seen that the paralinguistic component is the greatest determinant of performance on this section of the test (r = .71), in comparison with the verbal (r = .68) and nonverbal (r = .27) components.

4.2.6. The relationship between the IELTS speaking test (third section) and the micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol

Based on the results presented in Table 6, micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly positively correlated with scores obtained on the third section of the IELTS speaking test, although differences are discernable in the strength of the correlations. Having established that the paralinguistic component of the Protocol is the most important determinant of performance on this section of the test (.71 > .68; .71 > .27), of the sub-components (micro-components) that make up this category, 'intelligibility and prosodic' (r = .71), is most strongly positively correlated, followed by 'stylistic variations' (r = .65), 'speech acts' (r = .62), 'turn taking' (r=.62), 'topic' (r = .48), 'lexical selection' (r = .41), and 'kinesics and proxemics' (r = .27).

4.3. Research question 2

In this section, using the Pearson Coefficient of Correlation, correlations between the macro and micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol and overall performance on the IELTS speaking test are analysed in respect of gender[5]. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. The correlational statistics for components of the Pragmatic Protocol and overall IELTS speaking test scores (3 sections), based on gender differences.

			Speaking (Total) Female	Speaking (Total) Male
Pragmatics / Macro	Verbal	Correlation	.71	.75
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Paralinguistic	Correlation	.66	.81
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Nonverbal	Correlation	-.02	.55
		Sig.	.837	.000

[5] One of the reviewers mentioned that "except for 2 measures of the Pragmatic Protocol, male participants outperform female participants in all measures used by the study; it could be the case that differences were attributable not to gender but to competence level; the author(s) do not seem to contemplate this possibility." This is a plausible concern. That said, as mentioned earlier in this article, we elected to gather data from Nemune-Dolati schools because the students who enroll in these schools are required to pass a standard screening test of English whereby we understood that all the students participated in this study have upper-intermediate proficiency, something we were able to confirm by referring to the scores they had achieved on a written module of the Cambridge English Unlimited Placement Test (2010), administered and scored by the researchers. All the participants obtained almost similar scores. Therefore, the level of proficiency, as an intervening variable, has been controlled by the researchers.

Table 7. The correlational statistics for components of the Pragmatic Protocol and overall IELTS speaking test scores (3 sections), based on gender differences. (Continuation).

			Speaking (Total) Female	Speaking (Total) Male
Pragmatics / Micro	Speech acts	Correlation	.65	.67
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Topic	Correlation	.52	.41
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Turn taking	Correlation	.62	.76
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Lexical Selection	Correlation	.40	.57
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Stylistic Variations	Correlation	.76	.58
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Intelligibility & Prosodics	Correlation	.66	.81
		Sig.	.000	.000
	Kenesics & Proxemics	Correlation	-.02	.55
		Sig.	.837	.000

4.3.1. The relationship between the Pragmatic Protocol and female EFL learners' overall scores on the IELTS speaking test

As the *p* values show (Table 7), for the female learners, both verbal and paralinguistic components are significantly positively correlated with the total speaking scores ($p < .05$). However, the nonverbal component shows no significant correlation with the total speaking scores achieved by female students on the IELTS speaking test (parts 1, 2 and 3) ($p > .05$). The verbal component shows a stronger correlation than the paralinguistic component ((r = .71) vs r = .65), while the micro components of the verbal and paralinguistic categories of the Protocol are significantly positively correlated with the total speaking scores for all three parts of the test ($p < .05$). Among these sub-components, the strength of the correlation varies based on the r values as follows: 'stylistic variations' (r = .76), 'intelligibility and prosodics' (r = .66), 'speech acts' (r = .650), 'turn taking' (r = .62), 'topic' (r = .52), and 'lexical selection' (r = .40). However, the sub-component of the nonverbal component (i.e. kinesics and proxemics) is not significantly correlated with the performance of the female students on the speaking test ($p > .05$).

4.3.2. The relationship between the Pragmatic Protocol and male EFL learners' overall scores on the IELTS speaking test

As shown in Table 7, all three macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol are significantly positively correlated with male students' total speaking scores ($p < .05$). The paralinguistic component is the most strongly correlated with male learners total speaking score (r = .81), followed by the verbal (r = .75) and nonverbal (r = .55) components. As

the data show, there are significant positive correlations as follows between all seven micro components of the Pragmatic Protocol and the overall performance of male EFL learners on IELTS speaking test ($p < .05$): 'intelligibility and prosodics' (r = .81), 'turn taking' (r = .76), 'speech acts' (r = .67), 'stylistic variations' (r = .58), 'lexical selection' (r = .57), 'kinesics and proxemics' (r = .55), and 'topic' (r = .41).

5. Discussion and implications

The findings of our study highlight the important role pragmatic competence plays in regulating L2 learners' speech and the potential that exists to fine-tune the way in which we teach learners in ways that match task demands with the language awareness and skills needed to effectively and appropriately meet those demands. Furthermore, they offer the possibility of a more authentic evaluation of pragmatic competence based on different micro- and macro-components underlying the construct and based on speaking task conditions[6] (also see Spolsky, 1990).

To summarise the main findings, in terms of the macro components of the Pragmatic Protocol, our results indicate that all three components (verbal, paralinguistic, and nonverbal) are positively correlated with learners' speaking ability as measured by their performance on the three parts of the IELTS speaking test. In the case of parts 1 and 2 of the test, the verbal component proved to be a strong predictor of performance, where it is expected that the learners have greater control over different topics, while the paralinguistic component was a strong predictor of performance on section 3 of the test, where fluency and intelligibility are more relevant to discussing abstract ideas. The verbal component of the Protocol can contribute significantly to performance on the first two sections of the IELTS speaking test as this component requires learners to introduce and maintain the topic, monitor themselves frequently during interactions, and take turns appropriately – skills that align with the two parts of the test where the focus is on 'general questions on familiar topics' (section 1) and 'topic expansion' (section 2). The paralinguistic component of the Protocol was more positively correlated with the third section of the test, where there is more opportunity to discuss abstract issues and ideas. The paralinguistic component of the Protocol contributes significantly to the understanding of message and to creative thinking, enabling learners to perform better where the focus is on intelligibility and fluency. Accordingly, the results indicate that learners who were stronger in terms of the paralinguistic component of speech performed better on the third section of IELTS speaking test (discussing abstract ideas) – perhaps an unsurprising finding given that paralinguistics contributes to fluency in conversation and even to the ability to interpret otherwise abstract ideas.

In terms of gender differences, female learners' performance on the IELTS speaking test is more strongly correlated with the verbal component of the Protocol, whereas male learners' performance is more strongly correlated with the paralinguistic component. With regard to micro components of the Protocol, female learners' performance was correlated

[6] In this sense, Canagarajah (2009) argues that 'situated performance' is a factor that should be taken into consideration during assessment.

more strongly with 'stylistic variations', reflecting their ability to adjust their speech style under different dyadic conditions (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987). In contrast, male learners' performance was more strongly correlated with 'intelligibility and prosodics' and 'turn taking', reflecting their ability to promote "smooth interchanges between speaker/listener" (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987, p. 118) and reinforcing findings reported elsewhere (e.g. West & Garcia, 1988) that men have more control over topic during interactions. The gender-specific nature of pragmatic abilities uncovered in our study are also in line with the findings of Itakura (2002) and Erman (2008), who found that male learners were more competent in 'intelligibility and prosodics' (fluency, vocal intensity, and intelligibility) and 'turn-taking' (initiating, responding, and repairing), and therefore demonstrated greater control over the topic and discourse and thus a more 'self-oriented' conversational style (see Itakura, 2002). Female learners, on the other hand, talked more freely and their discourse was more colourful, incorporating various speech acts and stylistic variation into their speech. Furthermore, female speakers were more collaborative, asked more questions, requested more for confirmation, and reacted more positively to acknowledgements (male learners were more neutral in this regard). In this respect, female learners' conversational style reflects an 'other-oriented' discourse style (see Coates [1996] for further discussion).

The different tasks of the speaking test we administered to the learners each correlated differently with the pragmatic components of the Protocol, suggesting that different components of pragmatic competence are activated according to the nature and demands of the communicative situation at hand (also see Harding, 2014; Fulcher & Reiter, 2003). An understanding of these dynamics can help teachers to impart to their learners the "knowledge of those rules and conventions underlying appropriate language use in particular communicative situations and on the part of members of specific speech communities" (Alcón & Jordà, 2008, p. 193). Despite the differences observed among the participants in terms of how they approached the IELTS speaking tasks, it was observed that they were able to distinguish between tasks which required more limited information and those which demanded more creative thinking and attention to fluency and elaboration (verbal and paralinguistic). For the limited speaking tasks, individuals were more inclined to manifest aspects of the verbal component of the Protocol, while for more elaborate and abstract ideas they tended to manifest aspects of the paralinguistic component. The results of our study also indicated that L2 learners' performance did not correlate highly with the non-verbal component of the Protocol (body movement, gestures, facial expression, etc.), and this suggests that language teachers may need to teach learners the benefits of non-verbal communication, particularly on occasions when verbal communication breaks down, but also when there is a need to convey emotional states and interpersonal attitudes, and manage conversation (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978; Nakane, 2007; Mehrabian, 2017).

6. Concluding remarks

The findings of our study clearly provide evidence that the evaluation of learners' pragmatic competence needs to be informed by a more in-depth understanding of the components underlying the construct. They indicate that in addition to the verbal component, other components such as paralinguistic and nonverbal behaviours are also important facets of

pragmatic competence and should be given due attention in teaching and evaluating learners' pragmatic competence. As reported by Canale and Swain (1980, p. 1), a theoretical analysis of the set of principles underlying communicative competence and which are supported by empirical research findings can "establish a clear statement of the content and boundaries of communicative competence — one that will lead to more useful and effective second language teaching, and allow more valid and reliable measurement of second language communication skills." The results of our study have indicated that different communicative situations require speakers to draw on particular elements of pragmatic competence if they are to be negotiated successfully. Furthermore in developing their ability to do so, teachers need to be cognizant of the kinds of gender differences our study has highlighted. This kind of more in-depth analysis of communicative competence is needed in order to provide language learners with more focused instruction that targets their specific needs and aims. We believe that the Pragmatic Protocol has much to offer in supporting teachers in developing learners' pragmatic competence by providing a blueprint for such instruction.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix A

The Pragmatic Protocol (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987, p. 117).

Pragmatic Protocol				
Communicative Act	**Appropriate**	**Inappropriate**	**No opportunity to observe**	**Examples and comments**
Verbal Aspects				
A. Speech acts				
1. Speech act pair analysis				
2. Variety of speech acts				
B. Topic				
3. Selection				
4. Introduction				
5. Maintenance				
6. Change				
C. Turn taking				
7. Initiation				
8. Response				
9. Repair/revision				
10. Pause time				
11. Interruption/overlap				
12. Feedback to speakers				
13. Adjacency				
14. Contingency				
15. Quantity /consciousness				
D. Lexical selection/use across speech acts				
16. Specificity/accuracy				
17. Cohesion				
E. Stylistic variation				
18. The varying of communicative style				
Paralinguistic Aspects				
F. Intelligibility and prosodics				
19. Intelligibility				
20. Vocal intensity				
21. Vocal quality				
22. Prosody				
23. Fluency				
Nonverbal Aspects				
G. Kenesics and proxemics				
24. Physical proximity				
25. Physical contacts				
26. Body posture				
27. Foot/leg/ and arm movements				
28. Gesture				
29. Facial expression				
30. Eye gaze				

Appendix B

Definition of the Communicative Parameters of the Protocol (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987, pp. 118-119).

Definition for Communicative Parameters Assessed Using the Pragmatic Protocol	
VERBAL ASPECTS	**Definition**
Speech act pair analysis	-The ability to take both speaker and listener role appropriate to the context. Types: Directive/compliance—personal needs, imperatives, permissions, directives, question directives, and hints. Query/response—request for confirmation, neutral requests for repetition, requests for specific constituent repetition. Request/response—direct requests, inferred requests, requests for clarification, acknowledgment of request for action. Comment/acknowledgment—description of ongoing activities; of immediate subsequent activity; of state or condition of objects or person; naming; acknowledgments that are positive, negative, expletive, or indicative.
Variety of speech acts	-The variety of speech acts or what one can do with language such as comment, assert, request, promise, and so forth.
Topic	
a. Selection:	The selection of a topic appropriate to the multidimensional aspects of context.
b. Introduction:	Introduction of a new topic in the discourse.
c. Maintenance:	Coherent maintenance of topic across the discourse.
d. Change:	Change of topic in the discourse.
Turn taking	Smooth interchanges between speaker/listener.
a. Initiation	-Initiation of speech acts.
b. Response	-Responding as a listener to speech acts.
c. Repair/revision	-The ability to repair a conversation when a breakdown occurs, and the ability to ask for a repair when misunderstanding or ambiguity has occurred,
d. Pause time	-Pause time that is too short or too long between words, in response to a question, or between sentences.
e. Interruption/overlap	-Interruptions between speaker and listener; overlap refers to two people talking at once.
f. Feedback to listener	-Verbal behavior to give the listener feedback such as *yeah* and *really*; nonverbal behavior such as head nods to show positive reactions and side to side to express negative effects or disbelief.
g. Adjacency	-Utterances that occur immediately after the partner's utterance.
h. Contingency	-Utterances that share the same topic with a preceding utterance and that add information to the prior communicative act.
i. Quantity/conciseness	-The contribution should be as informative as required but not too informative.
Lexical selection/use	
Specificity/Accuracy	-Lexical items of best fit considering the text.
Specifying relationships between and across speech acts Cohesion	-The recognizable unity or connectedness of text. Types: Reference—semantic relation whereby the information needed for interpretation of some item is found elsewhere in the text. Substitution—cohesive bond is established by the use of substitute item of the same grammatical class. Ellipsis—substitution by zero and refers to sentences or clauses whose structure is such as to presuppose the missing information. Conjunction—logical relation between clauses. Lexical cohesion—achieved through vocabulary selection.
Stylistic variances	Adaptations used by the speaker under various dyadic conditions (e.g., polite forms, different syntax, changes in vocal quality).
PARALINGUISTIC ASPECTS	
Intelligibility	-The extent to which the message is understood.
Vocal intensity	-The loudness or softness of the message.
Vocal quality	-The resonance and/or laryngeal characteristics of the vocal tract.
Prosody	-The intonation and stress patterns of the message; variations of loudness, pitch, and duration.
Fluency	-The smoothness, consistency, and rate of the message.

Appendix B

Definition of the Communicative Parameters of the Protocol (Prutting & Kirchner, 1987, pp. 118-119). (Continuation)

Definition for Communicative Parameters Assessed Using the Pragmatic Protocol	
NONVERBAL ASPECTS	
Physical proximity	-The distance that the speaker and listener sit or stand from one another.
Physical contacts	-The number of times and placement of contacts between speaker and listener.
Body posture	-Forward lean is when the speaker or listener moves away from a 90-degree angle toward the other person; recline is slouching down from waist and moving away from the partner; side to side is when a person moves to the right or left.
Foot/leg and hand/arm movements	-Any movement of the foot/leg or hand/arm (touching self or moving an object or touching part of the body, clothing, or self).
Gestures	-Any movements that support, complement, or replace verbal behavior.
Facial expression	-A positive expression as in the corners of the mouth turned upward; a negative expression is a downward turn; a neutral expression is the face in resting position.
Eye gaze	-One looks directly at the other's face; mutual gaze is when both members of the dyad look at the other